

AM.
SERMONS

FOUR SERMONS

PREACHED IN THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S,
MARITZBURG,

BY

THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

THIRD SERIES: NOS. 20 TO 23.

PRICE ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE.

1867.



[No. 20.—Third Series.]

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S, MARITZBURG,

On Sunday Evening, August 5, 1866,

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

Ps.xxvii.10,11.—*When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up. Teach me Thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path because of mine enemies.*

THIS is one of the many passages of the Old Testament, which makes us feel that the Gospel of Christ was not altogether a strange doctrine to those who first heard it,—that his teaching concerning the Father, however it might transcend in clearness and fulness the old faith, bore yet the same relation to it as the noontide to the dawn. *That God, his heavenly Father, of whom he spake to them, was the same God whom their Fathers had known; and that God had been a Father to men; this, at least, had been the aspect in which He had appeared to those that feared Him.* “Doubtless,” said the Prophet of old, Is.lxiii.16—

“Doubtless, Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not; Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; Thy Name is from everlasting.”

And He appeared thus to them because He was so,—because He is the True and Living God, the Faithful Creator, who will not, nay, who cannot, lie,—who cannot prove false to His own gracious promises, made by that still-small voice which witnesses for God within us,—who cannot deceive us by wakening in us longing desires after Him, which He does not mean to satisfy,—who cannot disappoint the expectations, which His own Spirit has begotten in us, which His own creative work has expressly formed and fitted us for

cherishing towards the Author of our Being, by giving us that human nature which we share together, with all its tender feelings, affections, sympathies,—in one word, by making us know the heart of a parent.

Some, indeed, there are, who are continually warning us against the deceitfulness of our own hearts, against trusting to their plainest utterances, against placing our reliance on any voice that comes from within, from the depths of our own inner being. And there is a sense, no doubt, in which our hearts are “deceitful,” when they persuade us to yield to our own sinful inclinations, whether to indulge in what we know and feel to be positive sin, or, far more frequently, to shrink from what we know to be our positive duty, to shrink weakly from the pain or sorrow, which may fall to our lot in that path of duty,—from the pain, amongst others, which accompanies doubt, from that which some feel to be such a very painful labour, the labour of thought. Yes! often the ‘deceitfulness,’ the ‘desperate wickedness,’ of the human heart may persuade us to believe that we are right in taking the smooth and easy path, trodden by the multitude in matters of religion,—to spare ourselves the trouble and pain, from within and from without, of searching after truth, of proving all things that we may hold fast that which is really good and true,—may make us take for truth what we wish to be true, for right what we like to do. But there is a voice speaking in every heart which is not deceitful: it is the voice of God Himself. To deny it, is to accuse Him of misleading us, of leaving us in the dark as to our duty before Him. For though God may bless us—though, as we fully believe, He has blessed us—with a revelation from without, as in the pages of the Bible, or in the teaching of His prophets, the Good and True, of every age,—yet we can only know such external revelation to be Divine, so far as it accords with, however much it may surpass in strength and power, that inner revelation, which He makes by His Spirit within us,—in the seerets of our own spiritual being. External revelation is the same Voice of God, which we hear in our own hearts, as it has been heard by our fellowmen, whether in past ages or in the present. He may have taught some more fully than He has taught us; the Voice may have said more, or may have said it more clearly and powerfully: but assuredly He has taught them nothing contradictory to that which He is now teaching us.

From the beginning, then, the instinct of man's heart has been to cling to his Creator as the Father of spirits. Perhaps for this very reason the overwhelming immensity of the material Universe may have been left so long shrouded in mystery, that so the faith in a Personal God, and in Man's relation to Him as a child, might have time to root itself deep in humanity, and grow high and strong, sending its branches into all the earth, and more or less imbuing, if not indeed creating, the literature of every people. Not indeed that an enlarged acquaintance with the Works of God in Nature, when viewed in the Light of Reason, exhibits anything to contradict a living faith in a Personal God, which is the real strength of our spirits' life. But the grand results of Modern Science,—the immeasurable extension of the age of the earth,—the unutterable vastness of the heavenly host, their size, their numbers,—the awful void between two separate points of star-dust, which seem to uninstructed eyes in closest contiguity, — nay, the infinite profusion of life which the microscope reveals to us, the wonders on wonders of creative wisdom displayed in the construction of the minutest animalcule, the fact that a few drops of water may be seen to contain a universe of living beings, each according to its kind, full of energy and activity, — such truths as these, brought vividly home to our minds, are quite overwhelming to the imagination. "When I consider the heavens," said the Hebrew Psalmist—

"The work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him?"

What might he have said or thought, if there had flashed upon him suddenly the knowledge, which we have acquired, by slow degrees, about the starry host?

But we need not ascend into heaven, nor dive into the depths of hell, to find our God. The word is "very nigh us." The nearest friends and guardians of our infancy tell us of Him—tell us of our Father. Not man alone, but all things are provided for by God, in the instinctive love and pity of parents for their offspring while it needs their care. What a new discovery to the human parent is this feeling, when first it comes, this feeling of tender compassionate love for the helpless infant! Surely, it is not human virtue or wisdom that produces it: it comes by no effort of mind, no sense of duty: it is a gift from the Heavenly Father. It is

so, because He wills it, because he cared for us before we were born, and in His tenderness and love provided thus for us.

But more than this. It is the free outflowing of that nature which God has given us, to be the faint reflection of His own. The parent's love is not only the Creator's wise and gracious provision for the child; it is the very image to the child of the Creator's Love, that Love which gave it birth. Nay! He has expressly fitted the love of parents to show forth His own Fatherly Love to us. Parents stand at first in God's place to their little-ones. And, when they are first able to receive the idea of a Heavenly Father, it is formed in their minds on the pattern of what they have found their earthly parents to be. Wisdom and Tenderness, Governance and Protection, they know in their measure by experience; and so they learn to ascribe them to One Unseen, the Maker of heaven and earth. Happy children, who have had this first lesson written in fair unblotted characters upon the first page of their life's history! And thrice unhappy parents, whose children cannot think, at least, of goodness and of tenderness, without their early days recurring to them as a time when for them such things were not!

But the best of fathers and mothers are with us only for a time—not for the whole term of our earthly pilgrimage. The same wise and kind Providence, which placed them by our cradle, and left them with us through our early life, calls them most often home, long before our own time for departure comes. This is, as we say, "in the course of Nature"; that is, more properly speaking, it is as He, who is the Author of Nature and the Father of spirits, has ordained it. It seems fitting, natural, inevitable, that one generation should pass away and another come, in order to the progress of the species. At all events, so it is, and therefore it must be best. But, looking at the individual as an immortal spirit, to be trained here by God's Spirit for a more perfect state, through all outward things as media, we can at least think we see the wisdom of the arrangement, which consigns one generation, if not to the grave, at any rate to comparative inactivity, that the next, which it has reared and cherished, should be left to independent life and action.

"When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up."

It is hard to nature, it is painful to the surviving children, when death takes away from their midst those whom they love and reverence. But must it not be a special call to them to look to Him who ever lives and reigns, and who calls them His children in the Gospel? We "live by faith," says the apostle. Our true life is in that which is unseen: and thus we may interpret all our temporal losses into gains. Who are those who know what it is to be 'taken up' by the Lord, but those whom the failure of earthly hopes and confidences has taught to look above this world for comfort,—to lean the more heavily upon the Everlasting Arm, when other supports have been withdrawn from them?

We cannot help seeing that orphans, great as is their loss, are more tenderly cared for by the common charity of Christians than any other class. It is a real fruit of Christianity, of his teaching, who was ever leading the minds of his disciples to his Father and their Father, that they, who truly "say that Jesus Christ is Lord," should bear specially in mind the duties which they owe, as sons and daughters of the Common Father of all, to bereaved and destitute children,—that, when "father and mother" fail or forsake their little-ones, they in the name of the Lord should "take them up." Yet such labours of love, though quickened and enforced by the spirit of the Christian religion, are not peculiar to it. The Deuteronomist of old had enjoined all faithful Israelites, again and again, to "remember the stranger, the widow, and the fatherless," to let them share in their feasts and rejoice in their happiness, and to bear in mind also that "the Lord their God, the God of gods and Lord of lords, the Great God, the mighty and the terrible," who "regardeth not persons nor taketh reward,"—

"He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment."

But, in truth, in every nation, Jewish, Christian, Mahomedan, or Heathen, this primary instinct of our Humanity—and because of our true Humanity, therefore also of our Christianity—has more or less clearly developed itself. And those, in whom the Living Word was speaking,—in whose hearts that Light was shining, which is the true Life of men,—have felt a sacred call—not the less Divine, because most truly human—to show forth a fatherly care and compassion to the orphan. In this way, by first implanting, and then quickening, these human feelings in us, the Lord

"taketh up" those, whom death has deprived of their natural guardians, that were meant to represent our Heavenly Father to them. And for those whom not death, but vice, has deprived of parents,—the vice, I mean, of the parents themselves, making those who should have been their guardians their cruel tyrants, those who should have led them upwards into the light, the means of throwing them down into darkness and the tyranny of evil,—though we cannot see, we yet earnestly believe, that God will do all things well,—that "the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father,"—that by means beyond our knowledge, by processes beyond our comprehension, in this world or in the next, the righteous and merciful Lord will "take them up."

But Parents, in the sense of Protectors, may forsake or fail us. Even the best of parents are powerless to protect their children from many sorrows, many temptations, many evils,—however gladly, were it possible, they would even lay down their own lives for their loved ones. Or they may not be wise: they may even fail in sympathy, in insight into their children's hearts: they may not know how to help them. Or God may have called their sons or daughters to tread some higher path, whieh their own feet have never trodden, to enter on painful and difficult duties, of which they themselves have had no experience. Nay, we have most of us felt, as we grew in years, and became more and more involved in the active work of life, that parents, though still living, could render but little help to us in the way by which the hand of God's Providence has led us,—that they could not relieve us from our own weight of responsibility,—from the burden of toil and care, whieh we must bear, as living men and women,—from the trials by which our own spirits must be disciplined, and trained here on earth for the kingdom of God.

In all such cases, where the earthly parent fails, our Heavenly Father's Presence more than suffices for all our needs. 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?' No sorrow can come without His permission, who makes all things "work together for good to those who love Him." There is no hidden depth in any heart, whieh His searching Eye does not penetrate: there is no secret path that we are taking, whieh He does not know. He may lead us by a way which *we* know not—by which we had never dreamed of going. But, if we lean upon His arm we shall go safely

through it, and find that His Promise has not failed us. And if the way be dark,—so dark, that we cannot see, as it were, His Presence near us, and we cannot even feel for a time His guiding hand,—yet surely He is there, in the darkness as well as in the light. Then we must learn to say, with Job of old, xxiii.8-10,—

“Behold! I go forward, but He is not there;
And backward, but I cannot perceive Him;
On the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him;
He hideth Himself on the right hand that I cannot see Him;
But He knoweth the way that I take;
When He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”

But, again, we may lose the love even of our parents by our own fault. May we? Is it not almost impossible? Can a parent ever really refuse forgiveness, refuse to open his arms to the returning prodigal, however far he may have strayed, however deeply he may have fallen, however much he may have become degraded? Hardly, I think, unless the spring of true parents' love within the heart has been overgrown and choked with the weeds of pride and selfishness. And in this our father and mother represent more completely to us than anything else can do the Infinite Mercy and Pity of God. And so the Psalmist says in the text, “When my father and mother forsake me,”—in that extreme, almost inconceivable case,—“then shall the Lord take me up.”

But when they—our parents—our nearest and dearest ones—those who knew us best—are gone, it is not so hard, so impossible, to lose the friendship, the favour of our protectors, our relations, our benefactors. If we by our folly disgrace them, perhaps they would feel relieved from any further charge concerning us; for the sake of others, they may deem that it is their duty to cast us out, and leave us to our fate.

It is not thus with Him who is “of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity,”—to whom all moral pollution must be more offensive than to the most exalted human being. “He knows our frame; He remembers that we are but dust.” He looks upon us also as redeemed creatures,—who have been quickened with the Word of Life,—who have been sealed, as children, with the Spirit of Grace. And “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” Though He chasten and correct us, He will not give us over unto death. “All souls are mine,” saith the Lord: and when

the dearest earthly friends forsake us, and abandon our case as hopeless and incurable, then the Lord will take us up,—will take us, it may be, for sore judgment, for heavy chastisement, but He will not cast us quite away. Yet consider, O sinner, what bitter anguish thou art laying up for thyself by continuing in sin! Consider, further, what certain loss thou art incurring, through all the ages of eternity, by wilfully persisting in known evil,—what scars thou art leaving on thy conscience,—what dire recollections within thy memory! Consider, once more, if a spark of gracious feeling lingers within thee, how thou art insulting the Blessed God and Father of all, by preferring the husks which the swine do eat to a return to His Presence!

Lastly, we may lose the favour, if not of our natural parents, yet of those friends to whom we have been used to look for advice, support, encouragement, sympathy, even by our own *faithfulness*,—by obeying some call of duty which they do not hear,—by doing acts which seem to them foolish or even wicked, though done, as we believe, at God's command, because we could not, as true-hearted men, do otherwise,—by speaking truths which they do not welcome, which come into collision with their opinions and prejudices. We may lose them as friends! Yes, we may transmute them into violent and angry foes, who shall make us offenders for a word, shall watch to see when we stumble, and rejoice at our falling,—yea, think they are even doing God service, by finding occasion to overthrow us, by treading us down, if possible, and trampling us under their feet. It was some trial, apparently, of this kind, to which the Psalmist was exposed in the text, when he says—

“ Teach me Thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies, [or, rather, because of those who observe me, who mark my steps, when they wait for my soul.] Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses have risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty. I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the Goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord! be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart: wait, I say, on the Lord!”

But, if all the world were against us, we may go to our Father in Heaven and say, ‘ Teach me Thy way!’ This is all we need care about—to be in the way of duty, the Lord's way, the right path. Frail as we know ourselves to be, it is a comfort to trust that He who is mighty will watch over us, and, if we are sincere in our desire to serve Him, will hold up our goings lest we fall. Meanwhile, we

must go forward in our work, though friends may fail, and those whom we revered and loved — whom we still revere and love—forsake us. We must go forward at his bidding who ‘came into the world that he might bear witness unto the Truth,’ and who in his blessed life and death has taught us, trusting in God, to do the same. We must each do our part, as God in His Providence shall call us, to advance the great work of the age in which we live. For our lot truly has been cast in a wondrous time, which is thus described in the eloquent words of one of our great living statesmen, which have just reached us:—

Not merely in physical science, and the universality of its application, is a mighty change perceptible; but in morals, in philosophy proper, and in religion itself, we find the same distrust of mere dogmatic teaching, the same determination to ascertain what is actually true, the same fearless resolve to brave tradition and assertion equally, when they teach an arrogant infallibility denied to our finite nature, or when they exhibit an audacious spirit of denial still more arrogant and senseless. To some the revolution may seem mournful, because it has for ever banished the beautiful childlike faith of other days; and to those men this may seem an age of universal scepticism. On the contrary, it is an age of universal reverence for truth, and universal fearlessness in the pursuit of that ever-receding beacon-light of humanity. It is a time of unquiet, no doubt, because the old moorings, that bound people to dogmatic creeds, are breaking, and men find themselves on the restless sea whereon every searcher for truth must journey. But the stars are overhead, and there is a light cast upon the waters, that leads towards home!

[No. 21.—Third Series.]

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S, MARITZBURG,

On Sunday Morning, August 12, 1866,

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

ACTS ix.34,35.—*Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of Him.*

IT is difficult for us to realise in these days the strange reluctance which the first disciples showed to admit Gentiles, the uncircumcised, to the privileges of Christian communion. We have heard in this narrative how St. Peter was *hardly* brought to preach the word to these devout persons assembled to hear him. Instead of joyfully recognizing that the Gospel of God's Grace, declared by his crucified Master, was a Message of Love to Man, "glad tidings of great joy for all people," he speaks of it as—

"the word which God sent unto *the children of Israel*, preaching peace by Jesus Christ."

Instead of leaping, as it were, to carry out that command, which we find ascribed to Jesus at the end of the first two Gospels,—

"Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations,"—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature,"—

words which certainly convey the whole spirit of our Saviour's teaching, though expressed, most probably, in the language of a later age, we find him still hampered with his Jewish prejudices, standing upon points of Jewish dignity and exclusiveness :—

"Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that it is a Jew to keep company or come unto one of another nation."

Eight years had passed since the day of Pentecost, when Peter himself, as we are told, had said to the assembled multitude,—

“The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off; even as many as the Lord our God shall call,”—

when he had quoted the words of the prophet of old, as applicable to the time then present,—

“It shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

And yet he has done nothing as yet to carry to the Gentile world the tidings of salvation, to bring them also into the covenant of God. He needs to be admonished by a vision thrice repeated, to “count nothing common, which God had cleansed,”—to “call no man common or unclean,”—to cast away his notions of his own peculiar sanctity, as a member of the chosen nation, one of the seed of Abraham, and take to his embrace the whole human family, as God had taken them. And even then, it would seem, he admits these devout Gentiles into the Christian Church with a cautious hesitation, which he would never have exhibited in the case of a number of Jews. As he speaks to them, it is true, he kindles into something like an offer of spiritual blessings through Jesus Christ to be bestowed on all. He says—

“To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name *whosoever believeth in him* shall receive remission of sins.”

But his reason for baptizing them was not that Christ had bidden him to “go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name” of the Triune God. It was not based upon the universal promise, “He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved.” It is given as the result of a conviction forced upon himself, and “those of the circumcision who believed and came with him,” when they saw with astonishment that “on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

“Then answered Peter, Can any man *forbid* water, that these should be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?”

And we read in another place, on the authority of St. Paul, that Peter, the chief apostle, did not even hold fast the principle of the equality of all souls before God, which had been with such difficulty wrought in him, and which he announces in the text in language so plain,—as if he had really grasped once for all those grand truths of Christianity, the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. Ten years afterwards we find him still falling back into such

Judaizing practices, as showed that the middle wall of partition was not quite broken down for him, that "old things had not quite passed away, and old things become new" in Christ. For St. Paul tells us in a certain place, Gal.ii.11, &c.:

"When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For, before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation."

Here, then, were James, and Peter, and Barnabas, doubtless with many others of the first Jewish converts, "not walking," as St. Paul says, "uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel." And this adherence to the old things, to the exclusive privileges of the peculiar people, was only natural; it reappears in other forms, in other ages of the Church. Those, whose faith is built chiefly upon tradition, upon the reports or the teachings of others, are apt to cling, not to the God of their fathers alone, but to all extraneous notions, articles of faith, forms of worship, which their fathers have also transmitted to them,—as even Peter clung to the old covenant, and its glorification of the seed of Abraham—

"Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all kindreds of the earth be blessed,"—

when they had proved false to that covenant, had used it to foster their self-righteous pride and exclusiveness,—and God had made a new covenant with the children of men, "established upon better promises," and the old was "decayed and ready to vanish away."

The Jew, then, had yet to learn that the One Living and True God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was the God also of all the ends of the earth,—that "God was in Christ reconciling *the world* unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses *unto them*,"—that there was absolutely no respect of persons with Him. This was something not contained in the creed of his childhood, which seemed rather directly to contradict it. It was a heresy preached to him by one whom he despised, whom the religious leaders of the day had condemned, cast out, and crucified. And, though certainly Christ's own disciples, his immediate followers, friends, apostles, might be expected to revere God's Messenger in him, to hear God's Word proclaimed by his mouth, it

was hard even for them to realise the fact, that they must yield up all those exclusive rights to the favor of God, on which they had been building such grand expectations for this life and for the next, on which all their former worship, their duties towards Him, their religion in short, was based.

And still men will be seeking for some pretence, for some ground or reason for it in themselves, before they can believe that they are dear to the Father of spirits, are cared for personally, one by one, as children, by the Great Creator of all things. Although in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as taught by himself, as expounded in the Apostolic Epistles, there is no such ground or reason given, nothing but the free Love and Mercy of the Father, "who hath reconciled us to Himself" by His Message of Grace in Christ Jesus, yet still men must find some limit for that Love, some reason why some *may*, why all may not, partake of it. An enclosure must be made, and called the Church. To enter therein by baptism, by the profession of some creed, is to be one of God's dear children, to be entitled to claim His Favour here,—His Mercy, His Blessing, the Light of His Countenance,—with a hope full of immortality beyond the Grave. To be excluded from it by ignorance, the fault of others, or our own, is to be excluded from all assurance of the Heavenly Father's Goodness, or to be left to what some—almost profanely—call "the uncovenanted mercies of God,"—as if the very fact of His being our "Faithful Creator," of His having made us spiritual beings, endowed with reason, conscience, will, of His having awakened in us Divine longings after truth and righteousness, were not a sure pledge of His Fatherly concern for all the sons of men!

"Behold! the Heaven and the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain Him: how much less this House—this Church of ours—that we have builded?"

It seems to such persons that men are too mean and vile to be, merely as men, objects of the Fatherly care and love of the Divine Being. A great contempt for human nature is apt to grow up in the heart of a man, who has lived many years in the world, who has learned something of himself and something too much, perhaps, of others, has learned to judge them harshly because of what he may have suffered from them. Men seem to him, in the words of our poet, but as—

the flies of latter spring,
That lay their eggs, and sting, and sing,
And weave their petty cells, and die.

This is a morbid feeling, fostered perhaps—not by our real culture, but—by our elaborate civilization, which hampers by so many considerations of what is expedient any great action or course of action, till nothing seems left at times to one who really loves his kind, who really fears his God, but to let things take their course,—to let the falsehood rule in the realm of thought, the cruelty and injustice in the world of action, hoping merely in the Providence which “shapes men’s ends, rough-hew them how we will.”

How gladly would one obey the call, if such a call would sound, to “*sit still*, and see the salvation of God”? But no! this is the very cross: we must bear it, and not faint under it. If we are Christians, we are meant—we are called—to be *not* “sitting still”—to be *fellow-workers* with God.” He wills that we, as His children, having had His Love declared to us, assured that He will be with us in the fight with evil, should do battle all our lives long against the world, the flesh, and the devil, in the faith of that Love, of that Divine co-operation. But that Love is not *ours* alone; though on such an idea how many enthusiasts (we will not call them fanatics) have lived and died, who saw a part, but did not see the whole, of the Great Truth of Christ’s Gospel! The part they saw was true: God loved them, and held them up in His Almighty Arms, while suffering even for some small portion of His Truth. But we ought to know that the same Love, which supports us, is around all—is around even our enemies and our persecutors. A harder task is ours to maintain such a faith as this, and yet not too hard, in the strength which He gives us, remembering the words of the Captain of our salvation—“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

The whole human race redeemed from the power of evil by the indwelling of the Divine Word,—the victory of Faith in the Unseen Presence of the Living God,—the triumph at last of Truth, of Goodness,—these are articles of our Creed. Do we indeed believe them? Let us clasp them to our hearts; for no other victory will overcome the world,—no other faith will enable us to keep a brave, rejoicing, spirit in the midst of all life’s trials and difficulties,—will enable us to sow steadily, if need be, with tears, assured that the harvest will yet be gathered—whether by our hands or by the hands of others—into God’s garner with joy.

The prophets of Israel often labour to convince their

people that it was for no worth or merit of theirs that Jehovah had chosen them, to receive special communications of His Grace. But they do so in words which convey to our minds an idea of a favour, capricious because seemingly undeserved,—because incommensurate with their merit, not only absolutely, but relatively to other nations, who appear as if wronged by being, as it were, excluded from the knowledge of the One Living and True God. But let us purge our minds of any such ideas, and consider that the whole fabrie of humanity, the intellectual greatness of other lands, the moral and spiritual pre-eminence of Israel, were equally the Divine appointment for the good of the whole race,—that His wise Providence has ordered the whole course of human education, in all places, at all times. He did not look down from heaven at some given moment upon the families of men, and from amongst them, being such as they had made themselves, single out Israel alone to be His child and servant, the recipient of His Divine Favours. But, such as they were, they all were from the beginning by His Divine Ordinance. To each nation has He given its work: but they are all to be fellow-workers with Him. The work, therefore, we are sure, will be done.

"The Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary."

But what share shall we have in the joy and glory of this Divine work? Or shall we step aside, and let our portion of it—the work to be done in our day, by the men of this generation—be put into other and more faithful hands? If to any, indeed, the Lord of all has given *no* work, or next to none, in the world,—to the child dying early, to the weak in mind, to those incapacitated by singular and exceptional causes,—this is only to say that He has not given them talents to be employed for Him. He will not therefore require more than He has given, "reaping where He has not sown, and gathering where He has not strawed." And, looking out over the heathen world, which here borders upon our own, how many of our fellow-creatures do we see, whose powers and opportunities of acquiring knowledge or exercising virtue are not much beyond those of the young child of European parents, or even of the mind so weak as to border on idiocy!

But when the Lord cometh to judge the earth, to ordain another state for each of us according to what we have

"done in the body," can we think there will be any "respect of persons" at that awful judgment-seat? Children of religious parents, of parents respected amongst all around for their piety, their virtue,—admitted for your parents' sake to the homes and the hearts of all who love God,—will your parents' name suffice to admit you into the company which stands at His right hand? Members of orthodox Churches, leaders, it may be, of those who are zealous, as they think, for the truth of God, for His honour,—before whom men rise up and give place on account of the office or the character you bear,—will He who sees the very thoughts and intents of the hearts ask in that day what men thought of you, or take account of the influence you possessed with your sect or party,—except that "of those, to whom more has been given, shall the more be required"? No! says the Apostle, "of a truth I perceive that there is no respect of persons with God." We shall none of us escape His righteous judgment because of our colour, church, or creed.

"But in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of Him."

"He that feareth God." The apostle does not mean those who fear God from dread of consequences here or hereafter. This fear may frighten them indeed from doing some evil acts, but will not enable them to "work righteousness." No doubt, the first feeling that is inspired by the thought of Omnipotency, of the Presence with us of an Infinite Being, upon whom we are entirely dependent, would be naturally one of fear,—lest He should harm us, or withhold His protection without which we could not exist. Then, however, as our lives continue safe and crowned with His bounty, as one death and danger after another passes by us, and we remain unharmed, this fear dies away. It is not the true fear, on which the Old Testament bases all wisdom and virtue. That belongs to a clearer view of His Character and of His relation to us. That arises when we know Him as the Lord of our hearts and consciences, in whose favor is life, whom to know is Life Eternal, and who reveals Himself to the obedient soul, whom the pure in heart alone can behold. When we feel that, for Him to hide His Face from us in displeasure, is the worst punishment which even He can inflict, then we know something of true filial fear, the fear, as one has said, which cometh of love, the fear which love begetteth.

But with some religious persons the fear of hellfire, that is, of endless suffering in another world, is professedly an article of their creed. Yet they truly love God! This might seem impossible, but that we cannot doubt that it is so. We see a pure and holy and loving life; and, when we see this, we must believe that such good fruits spring indeed from the good root of love to God and trust in Him, and not from the fear of a hideous future, which, if it were truly realised and believed in, would drive the most phlegmatic mad.

The true filial fear of God implies a regard to His Will concerning us as Father, Master, Sovereign,—as having made us what we are, given us what we have,—and given us clearly to understand what He expects from us. By admonitions from without and from within He has taught us this,—by the light of our own minds, the law written upon our hearts, the revelations of His Will made by His Spirit to our inner man,—and by the utterances of our fellowmen, taught and enlightened by the selfsame Spirit, by the voices of Prophets and Apostles, and by the lips of the Son of Man,—by living words thus spoken in different ages, “at sundry times and in divers manners,” which we know to be messages to us from Himself, because our own inward sense for right, for goodness, echoes at once to them, because that sense is quickened, heightened, purified thereby. As many things in nature, which we should not have had wit to discover for ourselves, are clear and plain when once they have been shown to us, so the teachings of the Gospel,—the duty of entire trust in God as a Father, the duty, as the result of such trust, not of exercising kindness merely to others, but of living a life of selfsacrificing love, of love towards all our fellowmen, even our enemies, as children of God,—these teachings, I say, when once clearly seen, need no authority to prove them; they shine by their own radiant light.

Having once seen what is the true character of the Christ of God, of him in whom the Father is always well-pleased, we ought to fear to fall in our own persons under the power of sin, of sloth, of self-indulgence, of selfish hardness towards others. Many and great are the provisions for our comfort in this house of our Father in which we dwell,—so many that we are often in danger of corrupting ourselves even with His gifts, and so coming short of our high calling, as “sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.” See how in

the most favoured climes humanity seems even to degenerate, and the original races, without the spur of want, never rise much above the level of the brute! See how apt the children of the wealthy are, not only to fail in the harder virtues, but to sink to the still more degraded level of living for themselves alone, and of expecting subserviency from all around them! So that it is not difficult to see that the troubled lot of man upon the earth, the many pains and cares and sorrows which surround it, are as much a part of the Heavenly Parent's wise Providence for the more effective training of His children, as any of what we are used to call His bounties; and we cannot resist the conviction, which they evidently tend to force upon us, that what He seeks is not our mere happiness; it is rather our blessedness—that we should be conformed to His Likeness.

What then does He require of us? St. Peter says in the text,—

"He that feareth and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him."

The old prophet says the same in other words—

"What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Thy God?"

And such words as these, interpreted in the light of our Saviour's Gospel, do indeed comprise the whole of His requirements. But we must not forget that that Gospel has indeed transfigured the old Law, the old idea of the Divine Will for man. The love, which even the old Law required, was restricted virtually to those who were also children of Abraham. It does not rise to the universal love of man, as man, which is the Law of the New Covenant. It does not call for the sacrifice of everything—if need be, of life itself—in the cause of Truth, which is the cause of Man, the cause of God. It does not teach that, as he, our head, laid down his life for us, in ministering to us the Love and Truth of God, so ought we also to be ready, if need be, to lay down our lives for the brethren, for the children of our Father everywhere. A selfish life, if regulated by prudence, might satisfy, perhaps, the letter, though not indeed the spirit, of the old Law. But a selfish life, however decorous and respectable, however admired and praised by men,—though he, who leads it, may have made no enemies, may be surrounded by troops of friends and grateful dependants,—is dead against the cardinal precepts of the Gospel, and cannot be in any way construed as an imitation of Christ, as a fol-

lowing of him who pleased not himself, but was obedient even unto death.

But if for *us*, Christians, the Will of God is conformity to this high standard, this "righteousness" exceeding that of Scribes and Pharisees, yet in the case of those, to whom this clear revelation has not been vouchsafed, the righteous and merciful Lord will certainly accept an offering less costly, will be pleased with obedience to what each man knows and feels to be his duty. The humblest person, even the little child, overcoming temper, resisting inclination, in order to do what he thinks to be right, has that inward peace and sense of satisfaction, which is infinitely better than the most tumultuous joys. It is the testimony of a good conscience: it is because God "accepts" him in this thing.

Not a word, you observe, is said in the text about the *creed* of those whom God "accepts." To "fear God and work righteousness," is all that the apostle speaks of—to recognize His authority over us, and to obey it. If, however, a message comes to us from Him through the lips of a fellowman,—not the mere words and sounds falling upon our ears, but spiritual truth, which goes straight to the heart, which is its own evidence to the reason and conscience,—if such light has been vouchsafed to us, and we turn away and shut our eyes, because the flesh shrinks from the consequences, the duties, we shall be called to, the sacrifices we may have to make, when we open them to see, —we are not really fearing God with a true filial fear, in thus choosing to remain in the twilight, when He has opened a door for us into the light.

Some excuse themselves from thinking on disputed points in religion by some such reasoning as this. "Let us remain where we are: here we are safe. Let us abstain from such knowledge as will unsettle our minds, and spoil, perhaps, our peace and our prospects in life." Let us beware, however, lest in following this course we shall be saying to God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the clearer knowledge of Thy ways!" Let us obey God rather than man. He calls upon us in this age, as part of that very "righteousness," which we are to "work" before Him, that so we may be "accepted," to examine, to enquire, to prove all things before we hold them fast as good,—to do this, at

least, as far as we are able with the means and powers He gives us.

But to “fear” Him, with a truly filial fear, *forbids our dreading lest some error of the understanding, some defect in our creed*, through want of power to grasp or appropriate the thoughts of others concerning our God, should be reckoned as a crime in His eyes, should be enough to cast us out of His Presence, to prevent our being “accepted” by Him. Even when from ignorance, as in the case of many heathens, or from some intellectual cause of which we cannot judge, there may be no distinct recognition of a Personal God, the Lord and Governor of the Universe and of every human being, while yet a law of “righteousness” is recognised and followed, and that which is good is loved, that which is right is done, against the promptings of the lower nature, of the selfish heart,—there God may be said to be glorified, to be feared, for His Vicegerent in the heart is heard and obeyed: and there is something far more acceptable to Him in this, than in mere life-service and pompous worship, in wealth of pious words, and most orthodox professions of faith, coupled with secret disobedience.* The latter is indeed a mockery of the Majesty of Heaven, and the Divine patience with it would move our wonder, did we not feel that it has been exercised so often in our own behalf. Whereas the former, for the highly cultivated mind, is a great unhappiness, and not for a moment to be confounded with the case of the foolish man, who “said in his heart—There is no God,” because he was corrupt and had done abominable iniquity, because in fact he wished and hoped there was no one to judge him.

It is because our own faith is such a wretched puny thing, so much dwarfed and cramped by mere traditional teaching, so much propped up by dogmatic prejudices, so little the result of a deep and true conviction, cherished by a pure and innocent and loving life, that we shrink with such horror from anyone who is stigmatised as an atheist. If

* James Bainham, a barrister of the Middle Temple, . . . was charged with denying transubstantiation, with questioning the value of the confessional, and the power of the keys. . . . He had ventured to assert, that ‘if a Turk, a Jew, or a Saracen, do trust in God and keep His Law, he is a good Christian man,’ —a conception of Christianity, a conception of Protestantism, which we but feebly dare to whisper even at the present day. . . . On the last of the month (April, 1532) the drama closed in the usual manner at Smithfield. FROUDE, Hist. of England, II. p. 85-87.

we ourselves were living consciously in God's Presence,—if to do His Will were the ruling principle of our lives, to approach still nearer to Him our hope and stay in the thought of death,—we should only be penetrated with pity for our fellowman, who had blinded himself or shut his eyes to the central fact of the Universe,—much more, if, as we believe, an intellectual film has gathered upon his eyes, through no fault of his own, so that he cannot see, as we do, the Light of Life. We should not shrink with dread from contact with such a person. We should not be afraid lest he should rob us of our God,—lest, being blind himself, he should persuade us not to see.

[No. 22.—Third Series.]

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S, MARITZBURG,

On Sunday Evening, August 12, 1866,

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

Ps.lxvii.1,2,3.—*God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and show us the Light of His Countenance, and be merciful unto us; that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise Thee, O God, yea, let all the people praise Thee!*

To attribute all the Psalms, which are collected into one, and that the central, Book of our Bibles, to David, the shepherd, the hero, the king,—as it has been the custom from old times to do,—gives us, indeed, a vivid interest in, a personal sympathy with, the royal poet, which has such a charm for many, that it makes many unwilling to rob him, as it were, of his rights, to take away from that portrait of him, which they have formed in their minds, one shadow or one tint. Yet the fact is not thus, and it would be folly or even worse to reject the plain truth, because we do not like it. As Dean Stanley writes, *Jewish Church, 2nd Series*, p.586:—

As far back as the Christian era, this whole collection went under the name of ‘David.’ As such it is constantly quoted in the New Testament. As such it was received by the most illustrious of the Fathers, Augustine and Chrysostom. As such it is introduced into our own Prayer-Book. This uniformity of authorship in the Psalms has now been generally abandoned. Not only are the most various authors and ages admitted by all scholars into this once exclusively Davidic dominion, but even the time-honoured titles, which were long received as essential parts of the *Canonical Scriptures*, and which unquestionably represent the oldest tradition, are now generally treated as uncertain in date and unauthentic in substance. The consequence has been an universal recognition of that wonderful variety of situation and character, which gives to the Psalter one of its chief outward charms.

Sufficient, indeed, still remains in the Book of Hebrew Psalmody, which can only be attributed to David, to leave

him still one of those "sovereign masters of all hearts," as one Christian poet calls them, or as another, himself most eminent, says, one of those—

Who on earth have made us heirs
Of love and pure delight by heavenly lays.

But the result of a critical examination of the Book of Psalms gives us, instead of one only harp of many tones, the melodious voices of many human speakers, of many years, of many centuries. What matters it really to us who wrote this or the other devout and holy Psalm? It was certainly a fellow-man; and, his words being holy and devout, he was assuredly inspired by the Spirit of the Living God, calling out in His creature—yea, in His child—those truly human, and therefore Divine, powers, with which the creative Word had gifted him. Surely, the more we can multiply the number of the Psalmists, the more we can prolong their line and the stream of time through which their songs extend, the more we shall be able to realize His Presence with us, whom neither space nor time controls, the more we shall feel that the Psalter is the voice of the Church, and not of one mortal, however highly favored.

Without supposing (which would be unnatural) that the Psalmist meant in this Psalm to convey certain distinct lessons to his fellowmen, or to divide into regular heads the subjects of his aspirations, we may yet observe how a raised state of devout feeling finds channels for itself, which serve also to outpour the deepest wants and desires of our hearts and of human nature.

(i) He begins with saying—

‘God be merciful unto us!’

Mercy is the first thing we feel our need of,—it is the first cry of the awakened heart,—as the *fear* of the Lord is “the beginning of wisdom.” To realise in any *adequate* measure—*adequate*, not to Him, but to us—the Majesty of the Divine Being, and the relationship to Him of such limited, such imperfect, too often such corrupt, creatures as we are, is to feel overwhelmed, and “unable so much as to lift up our eyes unto heaven.”

‘How great a Being, Lord, is Thine,
Which doth all beings keep!’

But chiefly a conscious feeling of demerit, rather than of insignificance, causes the genuine cry for mercy. It is not the sense of our own *littleness*, if we were only what He

meant and called and willed us to be, that need make us shrink before the Blessed God, or that would have any power to make us do so. The ‘Faithful Creator’ cares for all the works of His Hands.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small ;
For the dear God, who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

No! it is the sense of our *greatness*, which makes us tremble before Him. It is, that He has called us to His kingdom and glory, to achieve victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil, to be partakers of the Divine Nature, to be His children, “sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty,” and that we are still—what we are, so fearful and weak, so selfish and cold, so far from any likeness to the Divine Purity, so little conformed to the Divine Image, to that pattern of truth and love and holiness, which He has given us in the Son of Man, in the Christ of God. It is this which bows down our head continually with shame, and self-loathing, and self-contempt,—which makes our approaches to the Throne of Grace resemble so often that of the Publican, who “smote upon his breast saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!”

Nay, but we must always draw near to God with a deep sense of our demerit, if we are true and living men before Him : for we shall feel that no other is appropriate to us. Not that the Blessed God is propitiated, as some seem to fancy, by abject confessions on the part of His worshippers, by self-depreciation extravagant and insincere. The Apostle says,—

“Let no man think of himself *more highly than he ought to think*, but let him think soberly.”

It is true, however, that the more advanced anyone is in the Christian life, in virtue, in holiness,—the nearer he approaches to that perfection, which is our only goal,—the purer his heart, and the clearer, therefore, his view of the Father’s Face,—the more will his own remaining imperfections grieve and torment him, the more will he shrink from every evil and corrupting thought, even crying with the blessed Paul,—

“O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?”

Let us beware, however, of taking into our lips the language of more advanced experience than our own, which

becomes a lie in our mouths, even when we mean to be true. Let us not express to Him, who sees the heart, any feelings which we *ought* indeed to have, but which are not really there, nor call ourselves miserable sinners, if we are on the whole very well satisfied with ourselves! "God be merciful unto us," however, we can all say with more or less of truth and feeling. For we all feel that He has been merciful to us all our lives long, that our blessings have been beyond our deserts, that at best we have been but cumberers of the ground, and have yielded little fruit to the Great Husbandman. And this teaches us to look for Mercy still. This gives us sure ground for trusting that He will continue that Mercy to us,—not merely in sparing us, in withholding the punishments which we may feel we deserve, but in supplying all those daily wants of body and soul, which are the conditions of our dependant existence. This helps us to pray with the Psalmist in the text—

"God be merciful unto us, and *bless* us!"

(ii) To be as nearly as possible without wants seemed to some of the old Philosophers to approach to the state of the Divinity. And there was a meaning in their notion, so far as they meant that a true man, a son of God, should not be the slave of lower appetites and passions, that he should be willing to forego without complaint many things which are pleasant and profitable to the body, for the sake of something higher, for the sake of truth, to gain knowledge, to grow in wisdom. But it was a false and foolish dream of the Stoics that man could or ought to be without wants. The chief wants of man as man, the want of light, the want of love, become greater and greater as his being grows and expands, as he attains a larger capacity for receiving Divine Illumination, for being filled with the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Love, for being "filled," as the Apostle says, "with all the fulness of God." His true state is one of dependence upon the Fountain of all Spiritual Blessing, upon Him who is "good to the soul who seeketh Him."

How fully is this expressed in all parts of the Book of Psalms, and how completely in this respect does its language express the longings of the human soul in all ages!

"My soul is athirst for God, for the Living God!

When shall I come and appear before God?"

"Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks,
So panteth my soul after Thee, O God."

How do such Psalms as these condemn by contrast the religion of many even in this day, in this blaze, as we are accustomed to call it, of Gospel light ! How many are there who, instead of thus longing and thirsting after God, a closer union with Him, a greater uniformity to Him, look to the worship and service of their Maker as a means only of assuring their own safety, their own happiness after death,—who regard this as the great “ blessing ” to be secured by their practice of religious duties,—who are anxious about the correctness of their creed, not that they may know God more truly and grow more like Him, but that they may not “ perish everlastinglly,”—to whom Prayer, the Sacraments, the Scriptures, the Church, are the keys which they expect will open heaven’s gate to them, when they are compelled to leave this earth, but who, having done what they consider necessary in this respect, have very little sympathy with the burning words of the Psalmist, with the ardent aspirations of the Apostle,—whose prayer for mercy and blessing means rather that they may be “ let alone,” and who would have joined in the deprecating words of the Israelites, “ Let not God speak to us, lest we die.”

(iii) But “ shew us the Light of Thy Countenance ” is the Psalmist’s prayer. Herc is no list of temporal blessings which he desired,—health, wealth, the bliss of earthly ties, of earthly love,—not even knowledge and wisdom, or a conscience irradiated with the remembrance of benefits conferred upon our fellows, with the triumphant feeling of success achieved in the fight against evil. “ The Light of Thy Countenance ” is something of higher birth, and yet shining lower down than any of these. It brightens all the orbs of heaven, but lights also the lowliest nooks of this world, where some humble childlike spirit is seeking to do God’s Will, or is saying, in patient suffering, “ Father, not my will, but Thine be done ! ”

But this is what we all need, and cannot do without. We are not solitary, self-originated, self-sustained, beings. Our aspirations mount higher than heaven itself, but they belong to all our kind, they mark us as members of a family; and the many spirits, to whom they are common, point all to one common centre, one common source of spiritual life, “ one God and Father of all, above all, and through all, and in us all.” The highest thing in us craves the support, the “ countenance,” of Him who is “ higher than the highest.”

The existence of the human race, endowed as we are with spiritual powers, would be an unmeaning thing, without the support of that great underlying verity, the Being of a Great Moral Governor, the Lord of the conscience and the heart, the Father of the spirit. And the course through life of every individual human being is also unmeaning, bereft of hope and light, a solitary fragmentary thing, without the sunshine from above of His approbation, of whose voice what we call conscience is only the echo.

What would the brightest earthly lot be without that Light, the ‘Light of God’s Countenance,’ the consciousness that there is One who sees our hearts, who knows our frame, who pities our weaknesses, who is ready to say when we put forth our strength—God’s Gift—in acts of faithfulness, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant”! How little and how mean would life be, spent upon the satisfaction of our instincts, of our appetites and passions alone! Does not something within us revolt against that littleness? To be our own end, as far as our own will is concerned, to have no higher aim than just *ourselves*, though fitted, perhaps, by the Great Overseer into His own plan for the good of all,—will this satisfy our hearts’ desires? Do not our inmost souls claim kindred with that Great Overseer, and ask for the *Cross*, yes, for self-sacrifice in some form or other, as their birthright, their inheritance, who are “heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ”?

The Gospel gives us this which our souls cry out for. The old blessing of the Jewish Law, “to live long in the land,” is not enough for us. We must live with a more intense life. See what a vast field is open to us all, in the sorrows, in the sufferings, of our kind, in the ignorance of so many, living from the cradle to the grave with scarcely a glimpse of that Light of God’s Love, which shines so brightly on us! See the wounded travellers on every side of life’s pathway!—and do not pass heartlessly by. Think that they are the children of your Father, your brothers and your sisters in Christ; lift them up, if it may be, out of the mire into which they have fallen; pour into their wounds the oil and the wine of love and pity and wholesome reproof. Only thus can you live yourselves in “the Light of God’s Countenance,” who “makes His sun to shine on the evil and on the good,” who “sends His rain upon the just and upon the unjust.” One act of duty, one mission of love, specially

to the unthankful and the evil, will do more to bring us into that Holy Presence, where we may sun our souls in Our Father's smile,—will do more to maintain our claim to have kindred and fellowship with him, who pleased not himself, but suffered for us, that he might bring us near to God,—than all the doctrinal teaching in the world, however clear and accurate, however fenced round with authorities of the past, or enforced with influences, falsely called spiritual, in the present.

(iv) But the words of the Psalmist in the Prayer-Book Version, from which my text is taken, fall back again into a prayer for Mercy—

“ God be merciful nnto us, and bless us, and shew us the light of His countenance, and be merciful unto us ! ”

These last words are wanting in the Bible Version of the Psalm ; but they express most naturally the ever-recurring needs of the human soul. ‘ Mercy’ is the first, ‘ Mercy’ the last, thing that we need. All through our course, even when we are sincerely “ working with God,” as the apostle bids us, when we are most earnestly seeking to do His Will, we need still to cry—

Mercy, good Lord, Mercy I ask,
This is the total sum ;
For Mercy, Lord, is all my suit;
O let Thy Mercy come !

For what awful privileges are involved in that near approach to the Blessed God, which the Gospel opens to us ! How shall we, frail creatures, all whose doings are mixed with some weakness, with some pollution,— who are always sliding back, through the attraction of this world and its concerns and pleasures, from that point at which our souls are aiming,— how shall we, without His mercy and pity, constantly awake and exercised on our behalf, escape being cast out from the Light of His Countenance, from the joy of His Presence ? But, Blessed be His Name !—

“ His compassions fail not : they are new every morning.”

Despair lies never on the way back into His Presence. But how soon may it not seize with the force of madness upon those who persevere in departing from Him !

All these petitions—these aspirations—of the Psalmist are summed up for us by our Lord in those opening words of the prayer, which he taught to his disciples, ‘ Our Father.’ Here we have the pledge of Fatherly Mercy, that will be

shown at first in seeking and finding us, in speaking the words of forgiveness and peace to us, in bringing us home,—of Mercy too, that will be shown throughout our whole course, blessing us with all things needful for body and soul, beaming upon us from time to time with the Light of His Countenance, in that spiritual communion of which the sympathy between parent and child is but a faint image,—of Mercy returning once more, after all our shortcomings, to “heal our backslidings and love us freely.”

But if in those simple words, “Our Father,” these spiritual blessings are all summed up, for which the Psalmist craved, for which the human heart of every one of us craves in its best estate, how entirely does the remainder of the text chime in with the following petitions in our Lord’s Prayer!

‘Hallowed be Thy Name! Thy Kingdom come! Thy Will be done in earth as it is in Heaven!’

We have here in other words the very prayer of the Psalm—

“That Thy way may be known upon earth: Thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise Thee, O God, yea, let all the people praise Thee!”

The Psalmist, as a Jew, regarded his own nation as God’s people in a peculiar sense, yet not, it is plain, an exclusive one. The Mercy shown to himself and to Israel, God’s Favour to them, was in some way to attract all nations into the same radiant sphere of blessedness, till Jehovah should be acknowledged as the King and Judge of all the earth.

“O let the nations rejoice and be glad, for Thou shalt judge the folk righteously, and govern the nations upon earth.”

He would be, then, a righteous Judge, the knowledge of whose way was to be man’s salvation, in contrast to those capricious deities, whom the nations had set up and under whose tyranny they groaned. For a righteous Judge, even though severe, is the only true Saviour, and not a wilful uncertain Power, who can be persuaded and cajoled, who favors some and not others, whose arbitrary mercy fosters vice, who punishes in anger, out of vengeance.

Such imperfect notions of the Supreme Being sometimes clouded even Israel’s thoughts concerning Jehovah. And, indeed, we are all apt without watchfulness to slide back into these Pagan notions concerning God,—to try and propitiate Him who is perfect Love,—to offer Him in sacrifice something short of our whole hearts, that we may keep the rest for ourselves!

The history of the Church, however, teaches us that a real reception and comprehension of Christ's Gospel must issue in zeal for its diffusion over all the earth. The early Christians, wherever they went, went "preaching the word." They did not go, indeed, to savage lands amongst barbarous people, as our missionaries often do in the present day, but to those who in many respects were as highly cultivated as themselves, or even more so. They had to learn new languages, as we have, or to initiate their converts into the simplest arts of life. Our modern missionaries have both advantages in these respects and disadvantages. The material, on which we have to work, is ruder, and the same results cannot be produced with it. At the same time we stand on a far higher level, intellectually and socially, with respect to those whom we seek to convert. We possess superior knowledge, superior power, which makes the intelligent Christian Missionary of our days almost a being from another and a higher sphere in the eyes of his flock.

As I said, however, the inevitable consequence of our having any measure of the knowledge of God for ourselves, is that we must long to bring all within our influence to share that knowledge. It is not merely a duty added on by express precept to a Christian's general code of feeling and action. It is of the very essence of a Christian to be as far as possible a Missionary,—to care for the soul of every human creature round him,—to desire to impart to each one within his reach the light and life which he himself enjoys,—to seek to bring every wanderer home to the family of God. Our Lord, indeed, denounced severely in the Pharisees the *spirit of proselytism*, while at the same time, we are told, he bade his disciples "go forth into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Every great and noble impulse in our nature is liable to be perverted, by becoming mixed with some baser element,—not liable, observe, to *excess*. We cannot be too just, too wise, too good, too merciful, or too forgiving; nor can we be too devout, too earnest, too desirous to bring all our fellowmen to see that truth of God which has been revealed to us. But, if self mixes with our zeal, as it is so apt to do,—if it is *our* opinion that we seek to spread, *our* party in the religious world that we desire to strengthen, *our* Church that we want to set up, instead of trying to lead our brother nearer to his God, then the gold becomes changed, the fine gold dim; and the most

unjustifiable things, we know, have been done, the greatest falsehoods uttered, by religious zeal thus gone astray. The annals of the Missionary Church contain alas! too many proofs of this. Yet we must thank God for the love and zeal, which has been displayed by Missionaries of all Churches in all ages; and trust that every accession of light, of purity, of life, to the main body will increase the efficiency of this its advanced guard in the heathen world.

Some, indeed, imagine that, when the dogma of an eternal hell is given up, when men cease to think that everlasting torments will be the portion of ignorance, of disbelief, the main-spring of missionary enterprise will be snapped. For those whose religion is merely a means of escaping from the wrath to come, and not a real and positive "blessing" in itself,—the means of enjoying the brightness of "the Light of God's Countenance,"—such will, no doubt, be the case. But those who know something by their own experience of the Goodness of God, who prize that knowledge more than life itself, who feel that life would be a blank without it, *they* cannot help longing to share their blessedness with others. Yes! those who have had their own hearts warmed with the knowledge of God's Love,—whose souls have realised the truth of their Creator's Presence in the midst of His glorious Universe,—whose spirits have been wakened to the consciousness of their high vocation, their mighty hope, their angst parentage, as 'sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty,'—who have known for themselves the blessedness of living, amidst all life's duties, trials, sorrows, in daily communion with God, the Father of spirits, the Spring and Source of all light and life,—such as these cannot be content with having the blessing for themselves alone; they must help in some way, as best they can, to spread the knowledge of God's Love and Truth to others; their own joy would be utterly wanting in one of its chief ingredients, if they did not believe, and act upon the belief, that the truths, which have gladdened and refreshed their own souls, are meant for all mankind, and are only first granted to them that they might each be in his measure the ministers of this great joy to others.

And the knowledge of God's Love has, we know, in all ages, worked wonders in many savage hearts, and brought wild heathen men and women, clothed and in their right minds, to sit at the feet of the Christian

Teacher. And this has been the ease, notwithstanding the drawbacks to the reception of this knowledge, which the old traditional system has brought with it, such as the fires of Tartarus, and the crude notions of the atonement, which have taken up so large a space in missionary sermons, and helped to neutralize whatever might be added about the Goodness, the Righteousness, the Fatherly Love of God. Nay! we know that in spite of all their drawbacks and defects, the work of devoted men, such as are many of our missionaries, if only as the heralds of civilization, cannot but be a blessing to those among whom they toil. A body of such teachers, inculcating notions of the Supreme Being,—some true, and drawn from the pure living stream, which flowed in the teaching of the Great Regenerator of mankind,—some false, concocted in later ages, expressed in words and church-systems, by councils of fallible men or schools of theology, notions often at war with the moral instincts of those whom they are teaching, not because those instincts are too low and debased, but rather because they are too elevated and pure, too simple and unsophisticated, too true to human nature as it came from the Divine Hand, as when that old Bulgarian chief, being told that his father and mother and all the ancestors of his tribe, were burning forevermore, declared that he would rather go and burn with them, than live with a being so cruel and unjust as this God whom the Missionary spoke of,—such a body of teachers, I say, could never be utterly useless, an entire failure, in their attack on the darkness of heathenism,—first, because of the portion of pure truth which is mixed up with their teaching,—secondly, because of their trust in Him, who is the Supreme Educator of us all. For we believe that “God is with us” still, as He was of old, and as He has been all along, instructing and enlightening the hearts of His children, guiding and governing the ages as they go, and educating, in His own wise way, by wondrous influences from without and from within, the human race in the clearer knowledge of Himself—

“making His way known upon earth, His saving health among all nations.” The true missionary goes, as the “heir of all the ages,” to convey to his fellowman whatever blessings he himself possesses, as the good gifts of the Father of all. And thus every white man, who teaches the natives industry and cleanliness, and the arts of civilized life, may be in fact, as

many a white man is, a true minister of God's Love to his fellows.

" Let the people praise Thee, O God, yea let all the people praise Thee ! " And let us bless God that He has made us all, one to another, " stewards of the manifold gifts of God." Our works of faith and love are never lost. If one atom out of the material universe can never be destroyed, surely these, more real and more precious things, can never utterly perish. Even war, we know, with all its horrors, has been a blessing to humanity on account of the field which it has opened for faith and love, for the heroism of duty, for the exercise of manly courage, patience, endurance, perseverance, for acts of self-sacrifice. And the Mission-Field, in spite of all the defects, moral and intellectual, of those who have laboured in it, has been another such field. And surely this feeling of love for our kind, this sense of the essential brotherhood of the great human family, which binds us all together as beings gifted with reason and conscience, and therefore capable of knowing, loving, and glorifying our Creator, and of loving and honouring each other, as reflecting the image of God,—this spirit, in short, which prompts the missionary to go, and the friends of missions at home to send him, while at the same time they are not found neglecting the calls which God makes upon them in His Providence nearer home at their doors,—is quite as noble and generous as the spirit of scientific enquiry, which carries men forth into other fields of arduous and patient labour.

Only whether this work is to be done at home or abroad, it is not the " guinea " that will do it. It is not money—it is love, and faith, and the spirit of self-sacrifice, in obedience to a higher law of duty, which is, in fact, the very essence of Christianity itself,—the spirit which in some way, in some form or other, we must exercise, if we are true sons of the Living God,—which in some way or other we must be taught to exercise, if we would live the Life Eternal,—and which the Christian learns from the example of his Lord, and, above all, at the foot of the Cross.

[No. 23.—Third Series.]

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S, MARITZBURG,

On Sunday Morning, August 19, 1866,

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

ACTS xvii.22,23.—*Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' Hill and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To the UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.*

WE can imagine that the feelings, which stirred in the mind of the devout apostle, when he found himself in Athens, were very different from those which contact with mere gross ignorance, with bigoted Jewish prejudices, or even with the more material and the more earthly pomp of Rome, was likely to inspire. Here was the home of the human intellect in its most truly human development,—the home of genius, of philosophy, of art, not the mere child of necessity, except indeed of that necessity, which carries the imagination out towards all that is great and all that is lovely. And here in this Athens, more than in other places, were temples and altars witnessing to the strong aspiration of the human soul towards the Divine,—witnessing of that instinct, which, in the darkness looking upwards still, beheld the heavens all full of glorious beings, shining serene above the “smoke and stir of this dim spot,” yet swaying human destiny and even controlling nature.

"Ye men of Athens, I perceive that ye are more than others zealous in religious observances,"—not "too superstitious," as our English Version erroneously translates the expression, conveying thus the idea that the apostle's very first words were words of rebuke. This mistranslation, in fact,—

entirely destroys the graceful courtesy of St. Paul's opening address, and represents him as beginning his speech by offending his audience. *Conybeare and Howson*, i.p.406.

On the contrary he says, 'Ye men of Athens, all things which I behold bear witness to your carefulness in religion. For, as I passed through your city, and beheld the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with this inscription, To the Unknown God.'

And, indeed, we cannot wonder that, while St. Paul stayed at Athens, waiting for the arrival of Silas and Timotheus,—"his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry," or rather, as it should be more properly translated, "full of idols," "fully possessed by idols."

As he approached the famous city by sea he would first discern the southern promontory of the Athenian territory, still crowned with the white columns of that Temple of Minerva, which was the landmark to Greek sailors, and which asserted the presence of Athens—the authority of her protecting Deity—"at the very vestibule of her country." Having doubled this Cape and left it behind him, he would, no doubt, with his other fellow-passengers, visiting Athens for the first time, look eagerly out, 'full of interest and excitement,' for the first glimpse of that city "built nobly on the Ægean shore," which was "the eye of Greece, mother of arts and eloquence." And, at length, its position might be revealed to him, as we are told it was to the traveller in those times, "by the flashing of the light on the armour of Minerva's colossal statue, which stood with shield and spear on the summit of the citadel." He will have reached at last the land, which rises for a moment, as the ship nears the entrance of the harbour, and conceals all the plain. 'Idlers come down upon the rocks to watch the coming vessel. The sailors are all on the alert. Suddenly an opening is revealed; and a sharp turn of the helm brings the ship in between the moles on which towers are erected. We are in smooth water, and anchor is cast in seven fathoms in the basin of the Piræus.'

Such is a modern description of an arrival at Athens; and substantially the same would be true of St. Paul's time. And now let us follow his steps, after landing, along the road which leads from the Port to the City, and which once formed a street across the plain, shut in by two high walls, five miles in length. Within those two 'Long Walls' lived at one time a crowded population, making with Athens itself and its Port, as it were, a third city. But the glorious times of Greece had now passed away. When St. Paul walked up, he saw on each side of him but "the broken fragments of the masonry put together in the proudest days of Athens,—more conspicuous, indeed, than they are at present, where only the foundations can be traced here and there across the plain, but still very different from what they were, when two walls of sixty feet high, with a long succession of towers, bid defiance to every invader,"—the street between them lined with countless habitations and thronged with a bustling multitude.

But with St. Paul we will now approach the gate of the City, and look around upon the objects which will meet his gaze. At the very gateway, close by the building where the vestments are stored, which are used in the annual procession of Athene or Minerva, the guardian Divinity of Athens, is an image of her rival Neptune, seated on horseback and hurling the trident. We pass by a temple of Ceres, and go through the gate; and immediately the eye is arrested by the sculptured forms of Minerva, Jupiter, and Apollo, of Mercurius and the Muses, standing near a sanctuary of Bacchus. We are already in the midst of an animated scene, where temples, statues, and altars, are on every side, and where the Athenians, fond of publicity and of living in the open air, fond of hearing and telling what is curious and strange, are enjoying their climate and enquiring for news. We turn to the right and go on till we reach the *Agora*, or 'market,' in which, we are told, St. Paul "disputed daily with them that met with him." But this must not be compared, with a great market-place, "like the bare spaces in many modern towns, where little attention has been paid to artistic decoration,—but rather with those beautiful squares of Italian cities, closed in with historical buildings and peopled with impressive sculptures. The Agora had been at one time "the centre of a glorious public life, where the

orators and statesmen, the poets and the artists, of Greece, found all the incentives of their noblest enthusiasm ; and it still continued to be the meeting-place of philosophy, of idleness, of conversation, and of business, when Athens could only be proud of the recollections of the past." Here were porticoes or cloisters, decorated with paintings and statuary, in which different sects of philosophers walked, discussing their different principles, and some of them, at all events, groping earnestly after the truth, "feeling after God, if haply they might find Him, who was not far from anyone of them." The 'Stoics,' mentioned expressly as discoursing with St. Paul, were so called from the portico, or colonnade, —in Greek *Stoa*,—in which they assembled. This evening I will give you some account of the opinions of the Stoics and Epicureans, whom St. Paul here encountered, and show how the spirit of true Christianity includes in itself what is just and true in the teachings of those philosophers, though it rejects what is unsound and untenable. I am now occupied in showing what abundant ground there was for the apostle's assertion, that unusual attention was paid by the Athenians to the public observances of religion. As he walked about the Agora, he would see the statues of the great men of Athens, of Solon the lawgiver, Conon the Admiral, Demosthenes the orator. But he would see also those of her deified heroes, Hercules and Theseus, and all the series from whom her different tribes were named. There he would observe also statues of Mercury, statues of Apollo, the altar of the Twelve Gods. Looking upward to the Areopagus or Mars' Hill, he would perceive the Temple of Ares or Mars, the God of War, from whom that eminence was named ; and the sanctuary of the Furies is hard by, hidden only from sight in a deep cleft. Looking forwards to the Acropolis, he would behold there a series of little sanctuaries, shrines of Bacchus and Æsculapius, Venus, Earth, and Ceres, ending with the lovely form of the temple of the Unwinged Victory. All this would be visible to him, while standing in the Agora itself. But every public place and building was likewise a Sanctuary. The Record-House was a temple of the Mother of the Gods. The Council-House held statues of Apollo and Jupiter, with an altar of Vesta. The Theatre was consecrated to Bacchus. And, as if the imagination of the Attic mind knew no bounds in this direction, abstrac-

tions were deified and publicly honoured. Altars were erected to Fame, to Modesty, to Energy, to Persuasion, and to Pity —to which last, as an ancient writer says, though Pity is a Deity so full of help for the changes and chances of this mortal life, the Athenians alone of all the Greeks pay Divine honors.

And, if St. Paul mounted, as no doubt he did, the steep ascent which led up to the summit of the Acropolis, he would come face to face with multiplied forms of idolatry: for the spirit which presided over Athens was concentrated here. We know, in fact, nearly all the features of the spectacle, which he would then have had before him. At the entrance was the statue of Mercury, guarding the gate. Further on, within the vestibule of the beautiful enclosure, were statues of Venus and the Graces. There was a statue of Minerva as goddess of health; there was a shrine of Diana; and above all there was the Parthenon, the glorious temple which rose in the proudest period of Athenian history to the honour of Minerva, the Virgin Goddess, and which ages of war and decay have only partially defaced. Within was the colossal statue of ivory and gold, the work of Phidias, unrivalled in the world, save only by the Jupiter Olympius of the same famous artist. Another statue of Minerva was there, made of olive-wood, most ancient and most venerated, believed, like that of Diana of Ephesus, to have fallen down from heaven. But a third, though less sacred, was the most conspicuous of all. Formed from the brazen spoils of the battle of Marathon, it rose in gigantic proportions above all the buildings of the Acropolis, and stood with spear and shield as the tutelary divinity of Athens and Attica. It was this statue, which, as I have said, may have caught the eye of St. Paul himself, from the deck of the vessel in which he approached the land. Now he had landed, and beheld the wonders of that city, which divides with one other all the glory of heathen antiquity. His path had been among the forms of great men and deified heroes, among the temples, the statues, the altars, of the Gods of Greece. He had seen the creations of mythology represented to the eye, in every form of beauty and grandeur, by the sculptor and the architect. And the one overpowering result was this—"His spirit was stirred within him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry."

When Paul was preaching before the Roman Governor, we remember, he "reasoned about righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," till Felix trembled. He appealed to his fears: he strove to arouse his conscience. The Roman, having taken possession of this world, of this visible and tangible sphere, cared probably for little beyond it. He was not curious to enquire about celestial themes: he was ready to say to his soul, 'Soul! thou art lord of all! eat, drink, and be merry.' But something still within him warned him that, powerful as he was, he was still accountable to a higher power,—that he could not with impunity injure his fellow-creatures or himself,—that he would have to suffer for evil-doing; and to this the apostle appealed when he preached before him.

But in speaking to the men of Athens, though he did not suppress the doctrine which he had to teach as an apostle of Jesus Christ, he appealed not so much, we see, to their conscience of evil, as to that desire for spiritual illumination, for communion with the unseen, of which their manifold religious observances were to him a token. There especially, that altar to the "Unknown God," though it marked them out as a peculiarly religious people, showed also a consciousness that they had not yet found their rest, that they were still far short of the goal of their being,—a conviction that their creed, though it embraced so many divinities, was not yet perfected, wanted something to satisfy the spirits of living men. And is it not, indeed, the very mark, the prerogative, of humanity, at its highest estate, to be still imperfect—to be pressing forwards evermore, forgetting the things behind, reaching on to those which are before? Is it not part of the very charter of our immortality, that we have these divine desires which can never be satisfied,—that even honouring what we do of Truth, of Christian Truth, we desire to know more, or to know more clearly and fully what we know in part now, but see through a glass darkly and only glimpse at,—that, whereas other creatures attain their perfection, such as their nature admits of, and then perish, man never attains his perfection, the perfection of which God has made him capable,—that there is always a depth and height of wisdom, an expanding sphere of love and virtue, a world of spiritual truth, still before him, as the offspring of the Infinite, Eternal, God?

As I have said, the many altars and temples in Athens, the multiplied rites and ceremonies of religion, were but signs of a feeling after God. It is true, all worship must have something of this character of incompleteness, imperfection. The most perfect human liturgy will always have some defects in it, some things which the higher-mounted mind no longer regards as steps to its devotion, with which, in fact, it would now dispense, though it may have climbed by means of them ; as the references in our own Prayer Book to the story of the Creation, of the Flood, and of the Exodus, had a meaning for us once, which they have now lost. We must feel, in fact, that the object of our worship transcends all thoughts, all words, all forms of expression, or our whole souls could not be forced into the attitude of real adoration before Him. If we could indeed comprehend Him,—if we could measure His Greatness, and fathom His Wisdom and Love,—we might revere Him, fear Him, love Him, but we should not truly worship Him. The true language of adoration is that of St. Paul—

“ O the depth of the riches both of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God ! How unsearchable are His Judgments, and His Ways past finding out ! ”

The Athenians, however, had not merely fallen short, but had gone astray, in their worship of many Gods. It was this very feature in their religion, which made it so incapable of satisfying the reason and the heart. One only God—one only Centre of worship—is the only rest for Man. No man can serve two masters : the duty and the service given to one is taken from the other. Yet there is, as we too well know by the facts of history, and by what in our own days we witness around us, a constant tendency in mankind to polytheism—to remove themselves out of the clear sunlight of that Great Central Fact of the Universe, the Presence of the Living God, into the dim shades of some idolatrous worship, in which they may be sheltered from the piercing glance of that pure eye, which will not look upon iniquity, but lose sight also of that Face of Fatherly Compassion, which, while chastening and correcting, is ready also to forgive transgression and sin. How continually did the Prophets of Israel rebuke their countrymen for serving other gods, even the work of men’s hands, wood and stone ! How mournfully, even in the Christian Church, has the worship of the Virgin, of the Saints, of the Sacrament, and through

them, most degrading of all, the implicit worship of the Priest, almost banished the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ from the thoughts, from the hearts, of multitudes calling themselves Christians! The language is still, in numberless cases, addressed to the Priest, the Saint, the Virgin, or the Church, the very same as that of Israel of old—

“ Speak thou with us and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

And we, the children of those Protestant Martyrs, who in cruel ages past purged our sanctuaries for us with their blood, have need still to be on our watch against the intrusion of idolatrous tenets, of idolatrous practices, whether suggested in hymns or commended in ceremonials, knowing how prone the heart is to rest in images, in symbols, and that the Father still “ *seeks* for those who shall worship Him in spirit and in truth.”

The Athenians had an altar, we are told, to the “ *Unknown God*.” Some say that this was erected through a superstitious fear lest some Deity, after all remaining unacknowledged amidst their multiplicity of worship, should visit them with jealous wrath and vengeance. Let us rather believe, from what we know of our own human longings, that this altar was built from a secret instinct that the True God was yet unknown amongst them,—from a craving for some one greater, wiser, better, than any of the many deities to which their altars smoked.

Here, then, stood St. Paul on Mars’ Hill, divinely taught, and therefore also divinely commissioned to teach his fellow-men, to declare to them, as far as he himself had realised it, the Name, the Nature, of this ‘ Unknown God.’ In what simple, majestic terms does he begin his discourse! He dogmatises, indeed, but not on the authority of men living or dead. He does not base his teaching upon signs or wonders, or urge belief on them on pain of perdition. His dogma brings its own evidence, and shines by its own light. Yet he does quote one authority, one utterance of a brotherman, no Jew, no Christian, but a man inspired, in expressing this great truth, by the Spirit of God. He quotes from one of themselves, one of their own poets, one of those who had been ordained of God to be the voices of their generation:—

“ as one of your own poets have said, ‘ We are also His offspring.’ ”

Perhaps, most religious truths, before they have become definite propositions, before they have been written in creeds and taught in catechisms, have been uttered with more or less distinctness by some poet, but received only by a comparatively few, and often felt, rather than confessed.

St. Paul, then, appeals to themselves, first, to their own hearts, their own need of such a God as he declared to them, a Being worthy of all adoration, the one absolute, self-existent, Being, from whom all others proceed, who is the only Giver and Lord, the Fountain, of all life and goodness. And then he calls one of themselves to witness not that such a being exists, but that they exist through and by Him, that they are His offspring,—more near therefore to Him, the Supreme, than they could have fancied themselves to be to any of their inferior divinities—more near by reason of the very fact that He is but One. For the heathen, it is true, spoke of one “Father of gods and men.” But the hosts of deities, of whom they also spoke, put ordinary men and women far away from the Father of all, and only heroes, great either truly or in their own esteem, ventured to claim the privilege of being ‘sons of Zeus.’

Yet even such a barrier as this between God and Man does the Church of Rome present with her celestial hierarchies, her angels and archangels, her saints and virgins! The spirit of her whole system is “Holy Virgin, intercede for me! Blessed Saint, or Sacred Martyr, interpose thy merits between my unworthiness and the Throne of Heaven!” But why do we speak of Rome and Romish idolatries? Are they not far enough away from us? Truly not, indeed: they are creeping back upon us day by day, and scarcely disguised. What matters what it is, which interposes between our souls and God, which shuts the door which by his Divine teaching Jesus has opened for us, for each and all, into the very presence of the Father, if the door is shut,—if the Church, the Sacraments, and the Priest who dispenses them, are indispensable to our devotions, to our peace of mind, to our hopes of heaven? If a man,—shortsighted, narrow-hearted, shallow-minded, as we know the best of us to be,—by a mere word of his lips or a stroke of his pen has really power to excommunicate a brother, to cut him off from God’s Family on earth and the hope of God’s Presence in heaven, how then should we be the better for that Gospel

that there is "one Living God, the Saviour of all men,"—
"one God, and one Mediator between God and men,"
"the Man Christ Jesus," who by His Divine Work in life
and in death has "declared" the Father to us, has brought
us near to God,—to that one God, who is "the Father of
all, above all, and through all, and in us all"? .

